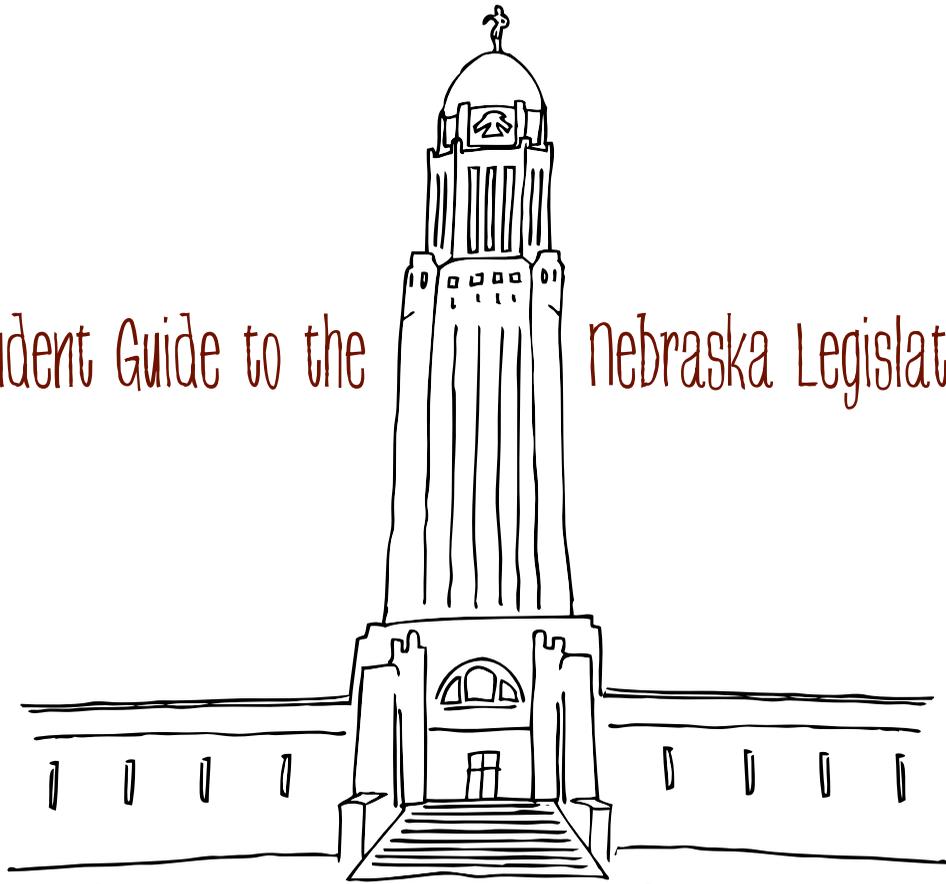


A Student Guide to the Nebraska Legislature



Can be used in conjunction with the Unicam Kids website NebraskaLegislature.gov/uk

Table of Contents

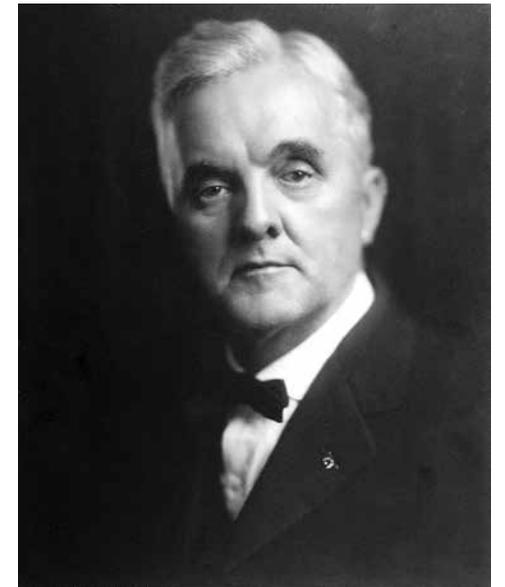
History of the Unicameral.....	1-2
Nebraska Legislature Facts.....	3-4
Sights from the Capitol	5
Which District Do You Live In?	6
Who is Your Senator?	7-8
How a Bill Becomes a Law	9-12
Committees	13
Write Your Senator.....	14
Legislative Terms	15-16
Word Search.....	17
Crossword.....	18
Matching	19
State Symbols	20
Compromise.....	21
Visiting the Capitol	22

History of the Unicameral.....

Nebraska's Legislature is one-of-a-kind among all the state legislatures in the United States of America. The Nebraska Legislature is made up of one legislative house called a **unicameral**. All other states have legislatures made of two houses, or **bicameral** legislatures. Nebraska was the same for much of its history. For 67 years, Nebraska had a bicameral legislature, which contained a **senate** and a **house of representatives**. That changed in 1934 when Nebraskans voted to make their legislature a unicameral system.

Senator George Norris

U.S. Senator George Norris is known as the **founder of the Unicameral** because he led the effort to change Nebraska's bicameral legislature into a unicameral legislature. Norris, who lived in McCook, wore out two sets of automobile tires driving across Nebraska campaigning to change the Legislature. Norris said having a two-house legislature was outdated, inefficient and unnecessary. He said having a one-house legislature not only would be more efficient, but it also would cost less and make the legislative branch more open to citizens.



Sen. George Norris

Checks and balances

Not everyone was in favor of changing the Nebraska Legislature to a unicameral system. Opponents said that with only one house, there would be fewer safeguards to prevent the Legislature from hastily passing laws. However, Norris said there would be plenty of other checks and balances in the unicameral system to prevent this. Norris argued that the Nebraska Supreme Court would still issue rulings on laws passed by the Legislature, and the governor would still be able to **veto** bills, or reject bills, so that they do not become law.

More importantly, Norris said, citizens would have the right to vote for members of the Legislature and to place issues on the ballot for state elections. Also, the Unicameral would have easy-to-follow rules and allow greater access to the news media so the public would be more aware of the Legislature's activities.

No Political Parties

Besides being the country's only unicameral, the Nebraska Legislature also is unique because it is the only **nonpartisan** state legislature in the country. When candidates run for the Nebraska Legislature, the political party to which they belong is not listed on the election ballot. Norris worked to eliminate partisanship in the Legislature because he believed nonpartisanship would allow lawmakers to base their actions on their own beliefs, rather than according to party beliefs.

No Conference Committee

In a bicameral legislature, a bill must be introduced and passed in both houses in order for it to become law. However, sometimes the version of the bill that is introduced in one house is different from the version introduced in the other house. When this happens, bicameral legislatures rely on **conference committees** to work out the differences between the two versions of the bill. Conference committees are made up of members from both houses of a bicameral legislature.

Norris opposed conference committees because he said they often did their business in secret. In Nebraska's old two-house legislature, once a bill came out of the conference committee, it could not be changed; it could only be approved or rejected. Sometimes, Norris said, the bill that came out of a conference committee did not resemble either version of the original proposal. Norris argued that a unicameral legislature would eliminate the need for the conference committee.

Immediate Results

Nebraska saw immediate results in both cost and efficiency after citizens voted to replace its bicameral legislature with a unicameral. The number of legislators went from 133 in the two-house system to 43 in the unicameral system—nearly a 70 percent reduction. The last bicameral session in 1935 ran 110 days, passed 192 bills and cost \$202,593. The first unicameral session two years later ran 98 days, passed 214 bills and cost \$103,445.

Nebraska Legislature Facts

- How many hours must you attend school?
- On which side of the road should you ride your bicycle?
- Is your cat or dog required to have shots for rabies?

The answers to these questions are determined by rules that people must follow, or laws. These rules are created by lawmakers in the Nebraska Legislature who are called senators. They make laws only for the state of Nebraska.

- There are 49 senators in the Nebraska Legislature. Each senator represents one district that has about 35,000 people living in it. You live in one of these 49 districts.
- Senators are elected by citizens and serve four-year terms. About half of the Legislature is up for election or re-election every two years. To be a state senator, you must be at least 21 years old, have lived in your district for one year and be a registered voter.
- The Nebraska Legislature is a citizen legislature, which means most of its members have other jobs in addition to serving as a state senator. Senators receive \$12,000 a year for serving in the Legislature.
- Our Legislature meets once each year in a **regular session**. The regular session in odd-numbered years lasts 90 days and the regular session in even-numbered years lasts 60 days. These legislative sessions begin at 10 a.m. on the first Wednesday following the first Monday in January.
- Sometimes, senators are called back to the Capitol in Lincoln for a **special session**. The governor is given the power to call special sessions between regular sessions in order to handle emergencies.



- The Legislature has committees, or small groups of senators, that review proposed laws and study issues. Every bill introduced in the Legislature has a **public hearing** in committee. Public hearings give citizens and others the chance to present their opinions about proposed laws. Those opinions help senators decide whether laws should be passed and, if so, what the laws should say.
- There are 14 **standing committees** that meet regularly during session. These standing committees take action on bills presented to them. There also are **select committees** and **special committees** that handle issues not covered by standing committees.
- When you visit the legislative chamber in the State Capitol, among the people you will see are the **lieutenant governor**, the **Clerk of the Legislature**, and the **sergeant-at-arms**.
- The lieutenant governor serves as president of the Legislature and presides over daily legislative activity.
- The Clerk of the Legislature is responsible for recording what actions the Legislature takes, counting votes and administrative tasks.
- The sergeant-at-arms and assistants, commonly called **red coats** because they wear red jackets, are responsible for security on the floor of the Legislature and at public hearings during the session.

Like you, visitors from all over the world come to Nebraska to see the Unicameral Legislature and find out how it works. Other states have considered changing to a one-house legislature, but none have done so. As a Nebraskan, you are unique because of the Unicameral Legislature and its influence on your life. You can get involved by speaking or writing to your senator, testifying at a public hearing or receiving information about the legislative process or a specific bill.

Fun Facts	
▶	Sixty-two women have served in the Legislature since 1867, when Nebraska became a state. Nine women served in Nebraska's early bicameral legislature, and 53 women have served in the Unicameral.
▶	The first woman in the Unicameral Legislature was Nell Krause of Albion. She was appointed in 1946. The first woman elected to the Unicameral was Kathleen A. Foote of Axtell, who began her service in 1955.
▶	Dr. Matthew O. Ricketts was the first African-American to serve in the Nebraska Legislature. He served from 1893 to 1897.
▶	Fun Facts: JoAnn Maxey was the first African-American woman appointed to the Legislature. She served from 1977 to 1979. The first African-American women to be elected were Tanya Cook and Brenda Council , both in 2008.

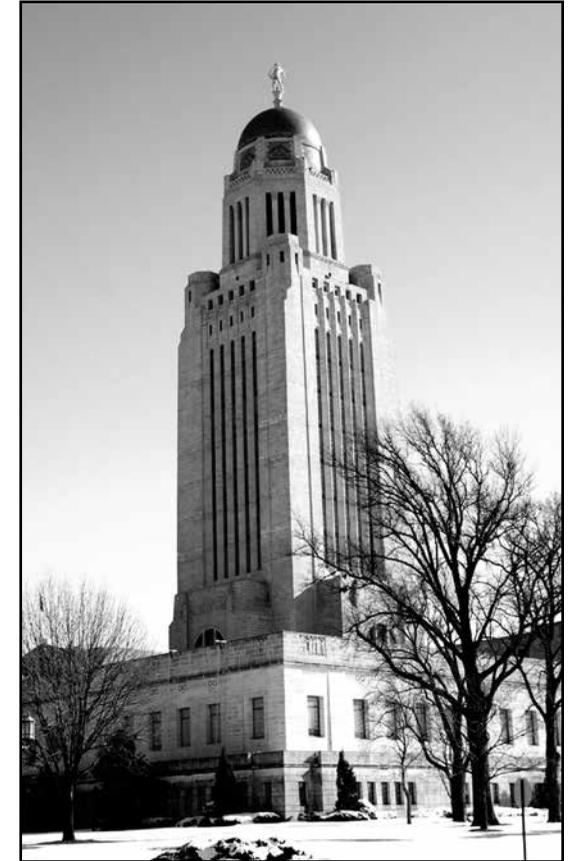
Sights from the Capitol



the George W. Norris Legislative Chamber (the room where the Legislature meets)

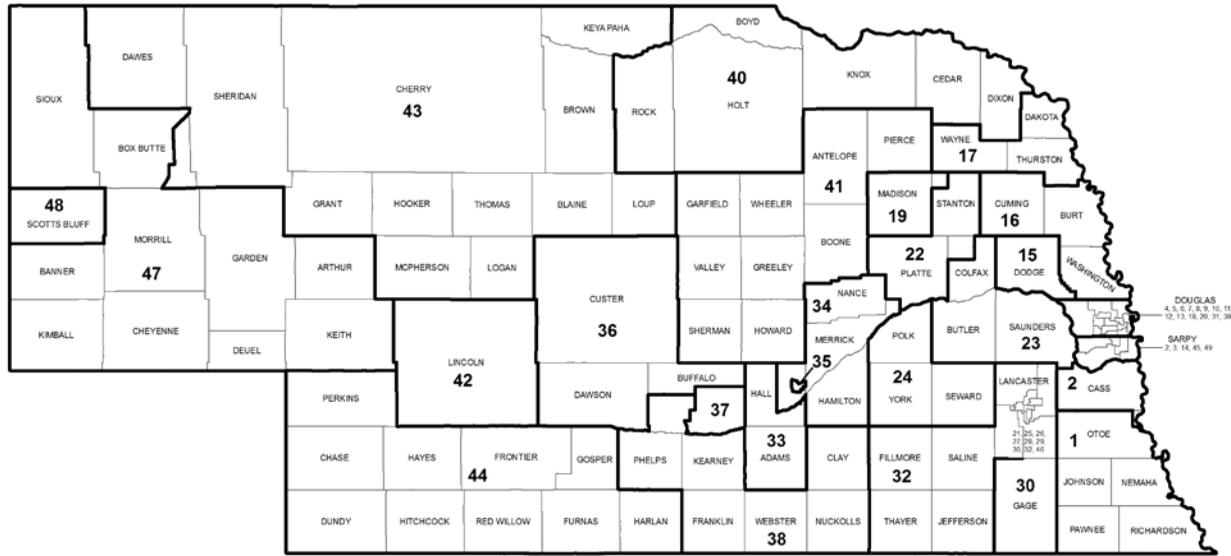


a committee hearing room

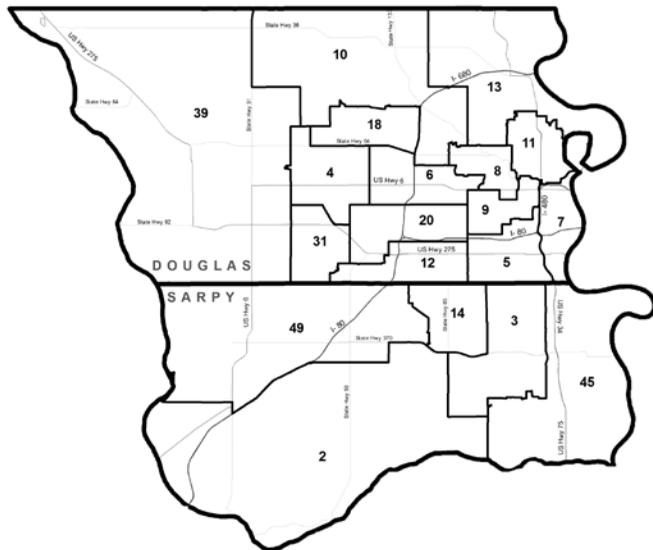


the State Capitol Building

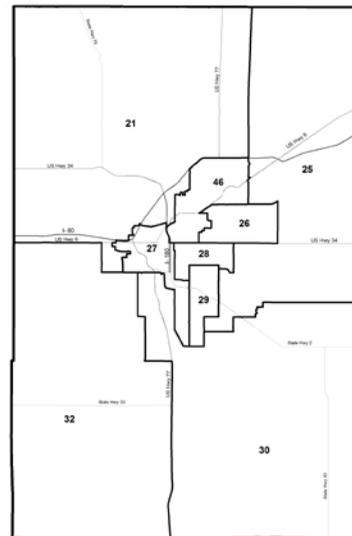
Which District Do You Live In?



Omaha Metro Districts



Lincoln Districts



For help finding your district, visit NebraskaLegislature.gov/find

Who is Your Senator?



District 1
Sen. Dan Watermeier
Syracuse
Farmer



District 2
Sen. Bill Kintner
Papillion
Market Research Sales



District 3
Sen. Tommy Garrett
Bellevue
Business Owner



District 4
Sen. Robert Hilkemann
Omaha
Retired Podiatrist



District 5
Sen. Heath Mello
Omaha
Community Development
Specialist



District 6
Sen. Joni Craighead
Omaha
Realtor, Real Estate
Developer



District 7
Sen. Jeremy Nordquist
Omaha
State Senator



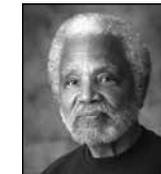
District 8
Sen. Burke Harr
Omaha
Attorney



District 9
Sen. Sara Howard
Omaha
Development Director



District 10
Sen. Bob Krist
Omaha
Contract Manager,
Chief Pilot



District 11
Sen. Ernie Chambers
Omaha
Defender of the
Downtrodden



District 12
Sen. Merv Riepe
Ralston
State Senator



District 13
Sen. Tanya Cook
Omaha
Communications
Agency President



District 14
Sen. Jim Smith
Papillion
Manager/Business
Owner



District 15
Sen. David Schnoor
Scribner
Farmer, Cattle Feeder



District 16
Sen. Lydia Brasch
Bancroft
Farmer/Business Owner



District 17
Sen. Dave Bloomfield
Hoskins
Retired Farmer



District 18
Sen. Brett Lindstrom
Omaha
Financial Advisor



District 19
Sen. Jim Scheer
Norfolk
Insurance Agency Owner



District 20
Sen. John McCollister
Omaha
Business Principal



District 21
Sen. Ken Haar
Malcolm
Software Company
CEO and President



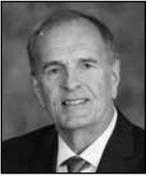
District 22
Sen. Paul Schumacher
Columbus
Attorney/Business Owner



District 23
Sen. Jerry Johnson
Wahoo
Retired Manager/CEO



District 24
Sen. Mark Jolterman
Seward
Insurance Professional



District 25
Sen. Kathy Campbell
Lincoln
Retired

District 26
Sen. Matt Hansen
Lincoln
Student Mentor

District 27
Sen. Colby Coash
Lincoln
Independent Consultant,
Self-Employed

District 28
Sen. Patty Pansing Brooks
Lincoln
Attorney

District 29
Sen. Kate Bolz
Lincoln
Executive Director,
Instructor

District 30
Sen. Roy Baker
Lincoln
Consulting Firm
Partner



District 31
Sen. Rick Kolowski
Omaha
Educational Consultant

District 32
Sen. Laura Ebke
Crete
Adjunct Professor

District 33
Sen. Les Seiler
Hastings
Attorney

District 34
Sen. Curt Friesen
Henderson
Farmer

District 35
Sen. Mike Gloor
Grand Island
Retired Hospital
CEO

District 36
Sen. Matt Williams
Gothenburg
Banker



District 37
Sen. Galen Hadley
Kearney
Professor Emeritus

District 38
Sen. John Kuehn
Heartwell
Rancher, Veterinarian,
Professor

District 39
Sen. Beau McCoy
Omaha
Contractor/Business
Owner

District 40
Sen. Tyson Larson
O'Neill
Rancher/Businessman

District 41
Sen. Kate Sullivan
Cedar Rapids
Banker/Bank Board of
Directors

District 42
Sen. Mike Groene
North Platte
Territorial Sales
Manager



District 43
Sen. Al Davis
Hyannis
Rancher

District 44
Sen. Dan Hughes
Venango
Farmer, Businessman

District 45
Sen. Sue Crawford
Bellevue
Political Science
Professor

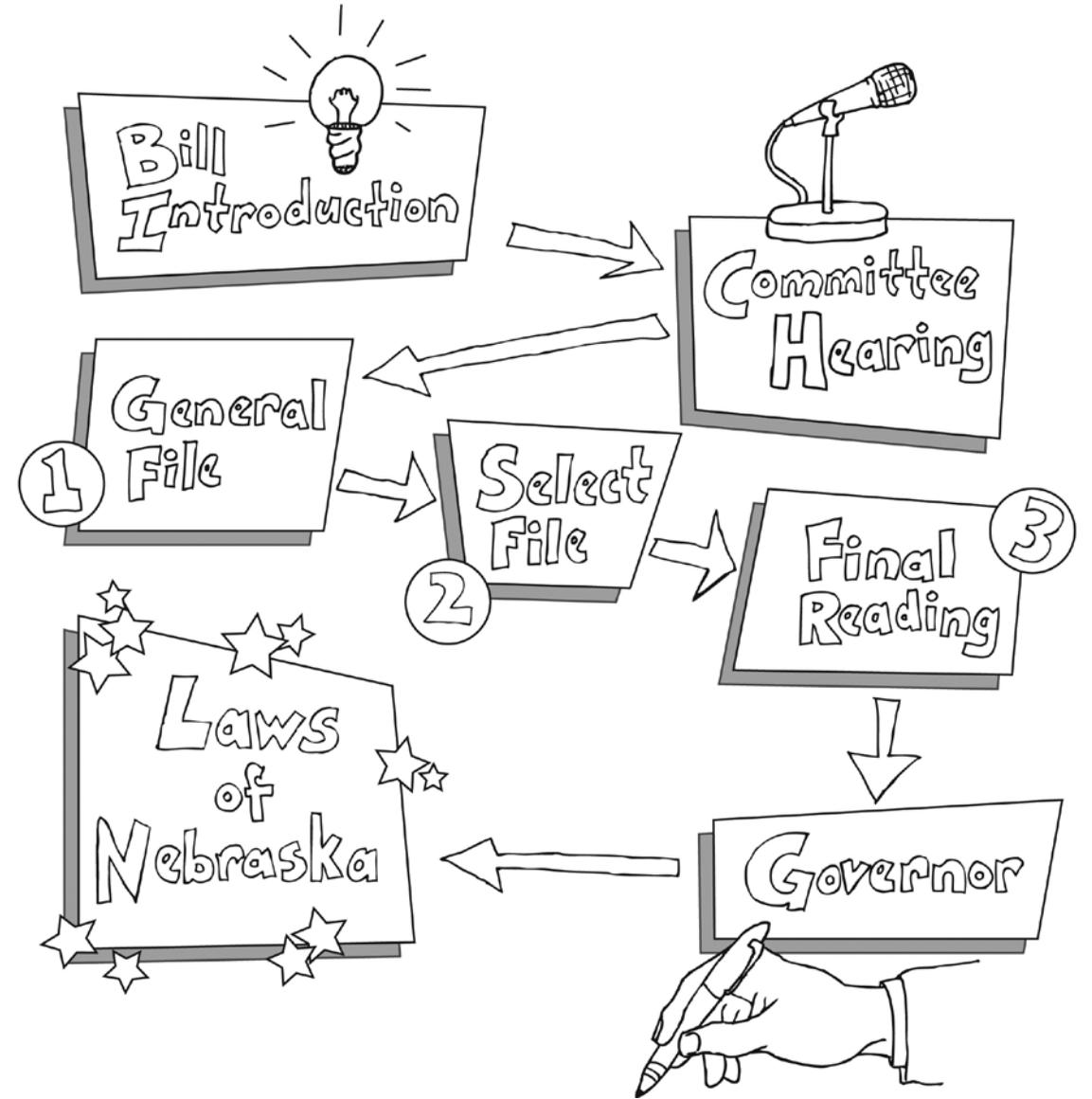
District 46
Sen. Adam Morfeld
Lincoln
Nonprofit Executive
Director

District 47
Sen. Ken Schilz
Ogallala
Cattle Feeder/Farmer

District 48
Sen. John Stinner
Gering
Banking Chairman
and CEO

District 49
Sen. John Murante
Gretna
Restaurant CEO

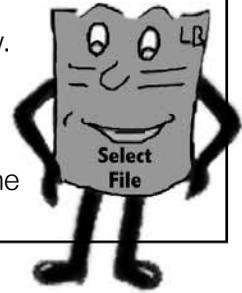
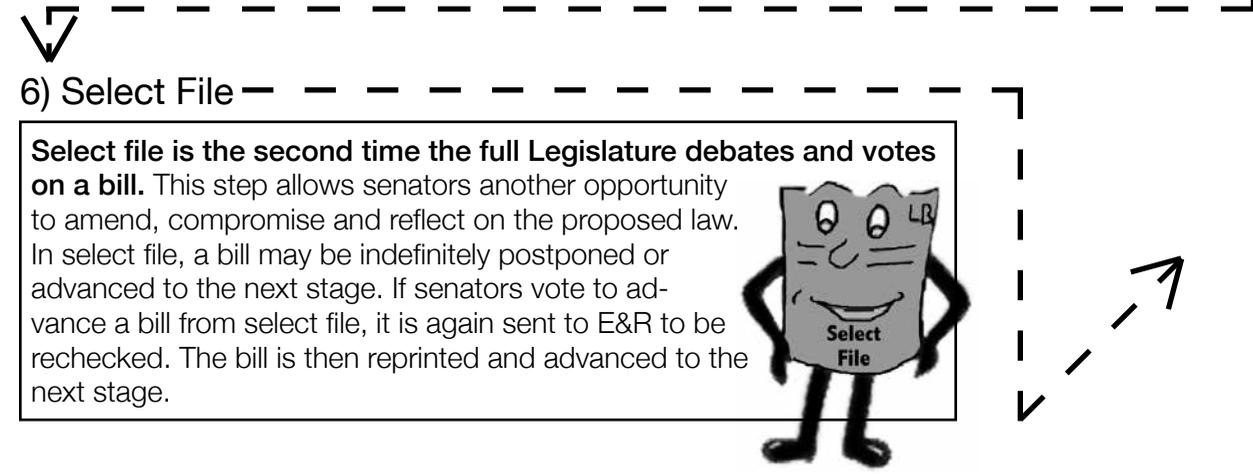
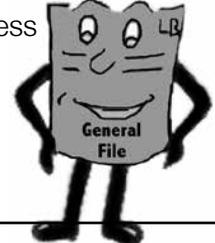
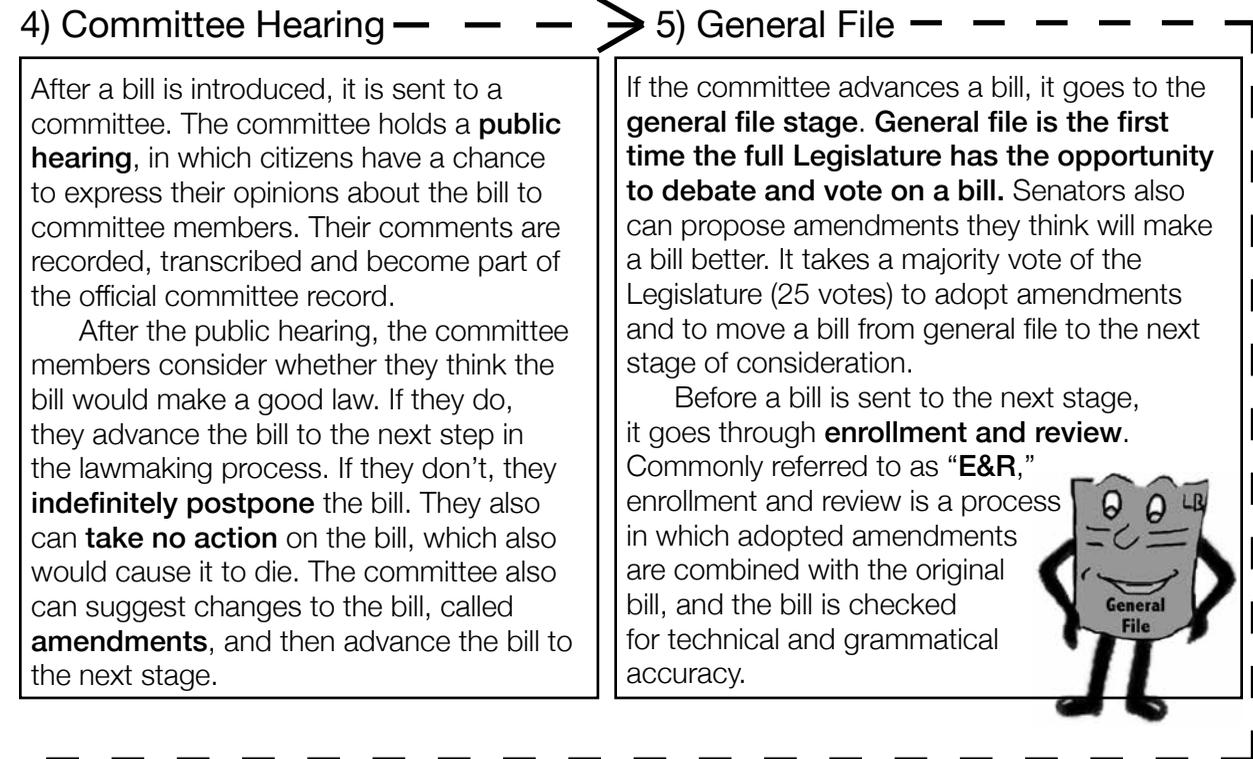
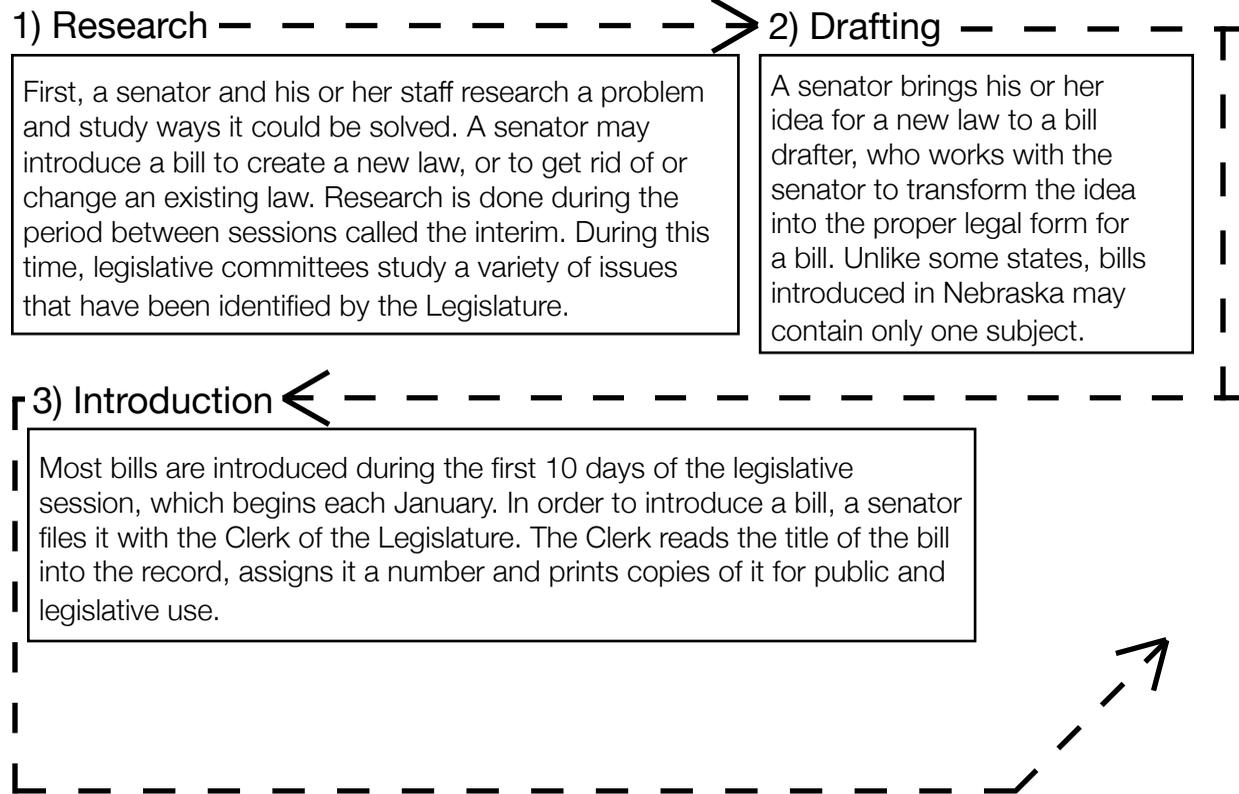
How a Bill Becomes a Law



Lawmaking in the Unicameral

The lawmaking process in Nebraska officially begins when a senator introduces a bill, or a proposed law, into the Legislature. But the lawmaking process actually begins much earlier — when a senator develops ideas for new laws. An idea for a new law may be suggested by anyone: concerned citizens (including students!), special interest groups, state agencies or the governor. The idea must be introduced by a senator to be formally considered by the Legislature. Committees debate and propose amendments to bills, and the full Legislature has an opportunity to debate each bill at least two times before its final passage. Senators may propose amendments to alter the bill at each stage of debate.

Here are the steps a bill must take before becoming a Nebraska state law:

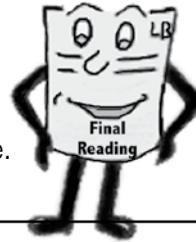


7) Final Reading

Final Reading is the third and last time a bill is considered by the entire Legislature. The Nebraska Constitution requires that before a bill's final passage, the entire bill must be read aloud by the Clerk of the Legislature. This happens unless three-fifths of the Legislature (30 members) votes not to do so.

A bill may not be amended or debated during the final reading stage, but it may be returned to select file to be amended.

Usually, it only takes a majority vote (25 senators) for a bill to be passed in final reading. However, some special bills need more votes to pass the final reading stage. A proposed **constitutional amendment** requires a three-fifths vote (30 senators) to place it on the general election ballot in November and a four-fifths vote (40 senators) to place it on a primary or special election ballot. A bill with an **emergency clause** requires a vote of two-thirds (33 senators) of the Legislature. We'll learn more about the emergency clause later.



8) Governor — — — — — 9) Effective Date

After the Legislature passes a bill in the final reading stage, it goes to the governor for his or her approval. The governor has five days, excluding Sundays, to decide what to do with a bill. If the governor signs a bill or declines to act on it, the bill becomes a state law. The governor may veto a bill, and can **line-item veto**, or strike specific budget items.

The Legislature may **override** a governor's veto, although it takes a vote of 30 senators to do so.

Most bills passed and approved by the governor become law three calendar months after the Legislature adjourns for the year. However, bills may take effect before that date if they contain the emergency clause. An **emergency clause** allows a bill or a portion of a bill to take effect immediately after the governor signs it or after the Legislature overrides the governor's veto.

Committees

As you just learned, one of the initial stages of the lawmaking process in Nebraska involves the work of the Legislature's committees. Think of committees as "expert groups" that allow senators to split up to work on bills that affect things they care about the most.

After a bill is introduced, the Legislature's Reference Committee decides which one of the 14 standing committees will receive the bill.

Committee

Policy Area

- » **Agriculture** farming, ranching
- » **Appropriations** state budget
- » **Banking, Commerce & Insurance** banking regulations, corporation laws, insurance standards
- » **Business & Labor** workplace safety, worker's compensation
- » **Education** state aid to schools, testing standards
- » **General Affairs** cemetery laws, library laws
- » **Government, Military & Veterans Affairs** election laws, redistricting
- » **Health & Human Services** hospital laws, welfare
- » **Judiciary** criminal laws, probation
- » **Natural Resources** water rights, hunting
- » **Nebraska Retirement Systems** state employee retirement
- » **Revenue** taxes
- » **Transportation & Telecommunications** roads, phones, railroads
- » **Urban Affairs** organization of cities, housing authority

Exercise:

If you were a Nebraska senator, on which committees would you want to serve?

Write Your Senator

As a citizen, you may contact your state senator about laws being considered by the Legislature, laws already in place or an idea for a new law. One of the best ways to communicate your ideas or concerns is to write your senator a letter. This guide includes a postcard that you can use to correspond with your senator.

Write your senator's name, district number and home address on the front of the postcard below. Then write your message on the back. Tear the postcard out of the book, place a stamp on it, and drop it in the mailbox.

If you would rather send an e-mail, go to www.nebraskalegislature.gov/senators/senator_list.php and select your senator from the list.

Insert
postage
here.

Senator _____

District # _____

State Capitol

Lincoln, NE 68509

Legislative Terms

Amendment - a proposal offered to a legislative bill that changes its original intent or language.

Bill - the document that contains a proposed law, referred to as a legislative bill (LB).

Clerk of the Legislature - an officer of the Legislature who handles all administrative functions related to legislative business. Positioned at the front of the legislative chamber while the Legislature conducts business, the clerk records activity and counts votes on issues.

Committee - a panel of senators that makes preliminary decisions about legislation or other issues and reports its findings to the entire legislative body.

Committee Chairperson - a senator chosen to direct the activities of a committee. Committee chairpersons normally are elected every two years by a vote of the entire legislative body.

Dear Senator _____, Date _____

Constitution - a document that states the basic principles and laws of the state, determines the powers and duties of government and guarantees certain rights to Nebraska citizens.

Constitutional Amendment - similar to a legislative bill, a constitutional amendment is a proposal to change the state's constitution that must be approved by a vote of citizens.

Final Reading - the final voting stage of a bill or constitutional amendment during which the document may be read in its entirety by the Clerk of the Legislature.

General File - the first debating and voting stage of a legislative bill or constitutional amendment by the entire legislative body. Bills on general file may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to select file.

Hearing, Committee Hearing or Public Hearing - a scheduled meeting of a committee at which the public has an opportunity to voice its opinion about proposed legislation.

Indefinitely Postponed - refers to when a bill is killed, which means no further action on the measure is expected.

President - another name for the lieutenant governor, who normally presides over legislative floor debate.

Select File - the second debating and voting stage for a bill or constitutional amendment by the entire legislature. Bills on select file may be amended, returned to committee, indefinitely postponed or advanced to final reading.

Speaker - a senator who is elected by the other members of the Legislature to handle administrative functions such as setting the daily agenda of floor activity and scheduling work days for legislative sessions.

Unicameral - name given to a one-house legislature, as opposed to a legislature that is divided into a house and a senate.

Veto - return of a bill by the governor to the Legislature without his or her signature, usually accompanied by an explanation as to why the governor thinks the bill should not become law. The Legislature must vote to override a veto within five legislative days after the governor returns the bill.

Word Search

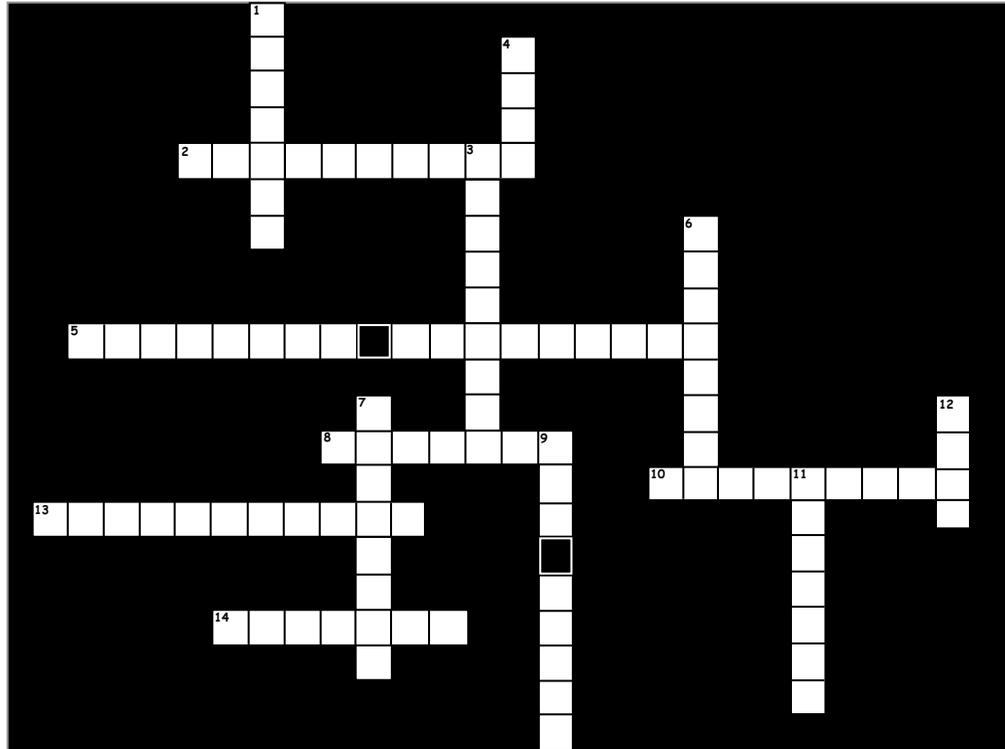
Search for these state government words. They may appear in all directions: forward, backward, up, down, or diagonally. Find each word and draw a circle around it.

Amendment
Chamber
Constitution
Floor
Governor
Hearing
Introducer
Override
Page
Speaker

R	C	K	J	E	D	H	Q	F	G	O	M
L	E	H	O	W	P	M	B	I	U	R	A
U	P	W	A	M	E	N	D	M	E	N	T
E	G	N	R	M	T	S	I	V	E	Z	X
D	Y	R	F	O	B	A	N	S	C	B	I
S	P	A	N	Q	I	E	T	A	Y	K	N
A	H	W	C	X	L	F	R	M	T	O	G
B	I	O	R	C	V	B	O	S	I	V	A
T	R	Z	E	A	R	H	D	T	E	E	B
V	U	Y	K	B	O	M	U	J	Y	R	W
X	E	G	A	P	W	T	C	I	K	R	E
R	C	O	E	A	I	V	E	B	X	I	T
S	P	I	P	T	Q	X	R	U	H	D	S
J	L	W	S	V	A	Z	I	K	C	E	A
E	G	N	I	R	A	E	H	B	F	V	H
M	O	T	Y	H	M	O	F	L	O	O	R
C	Y	K	G	O	V	E	R	N	O	R	E

The answer key for this exercise can be found at www.nebraskalegislature.gov/about/pubs.php

Crossword



Down

1. Committee meeting where the public can give opinions on a bill.
3. May be proposed to change the bill at each stage of debate.
4. A proposed law.
6. The person who has executive power of the state and signs bills into law.
7. The name of our state.
9. Nickname given to the sergeant-at-arms and his or her assistants.
11. Period between regular legislative sessions.
12. Governor rejects a bill.

Across

2. A one-house legislature.
5. One of 14 to which bills are referred.
8. Represents one district.
10. Also the lieutenant governor.
13. Elected body of persons with the power to make and change laws.
14. Officer of legislature who prepares daily agenda and presides in absence of the lieutenant governor.

The answer key for this exercise can be found at www.nebraskalegislature.gov/about/pubs.php

Matching

Match the following terms on the left with the definitions on the right.

Unicameral

How old you have to be to become a state senator

President

Commonly known as "red coats" because they wear red jackets; these people are responsible for security in hearings and the legislative chamber

49

A permanent committee of the Legislature that holds regularly scheduled hearings to consider bills assigned to it

Sergeants-at-Arms

As the lieutenant governor, the role of this person is to preside over the Legislature

Select File

The length of a senator's term of office

Standing Committee

The number of senators in the Nebraska Legislature

Indefinitely Postponed

The first debating and voting stage for a legislative bill or constitutional amendment by the entire legislative body

General File

The final voting stage of a bill during which a bill may be read in its entirety by the Clerk of the Legislature

21

Means one house

Final Reading

What happens to a bill when it is indefinitely postponed

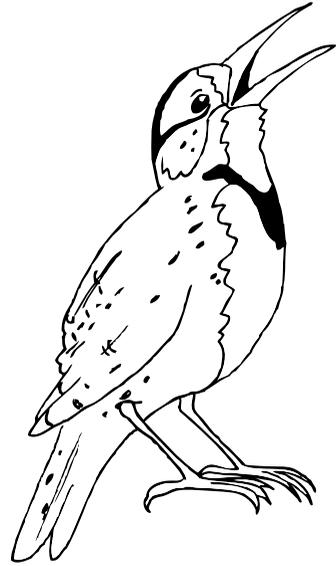
4 Years

The second debating and voting stage for a legislative bill or constitutional amendment by the entire legislative body

The answer key for this exercise can be found at www.nebraskalegislature.gov/about/pubs.php

State Symbols

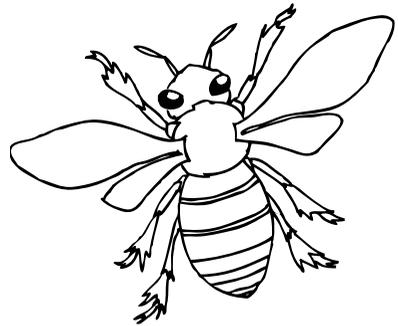
Color and identify Nebraska's state symbols. An answer key is at the bottom of the page.



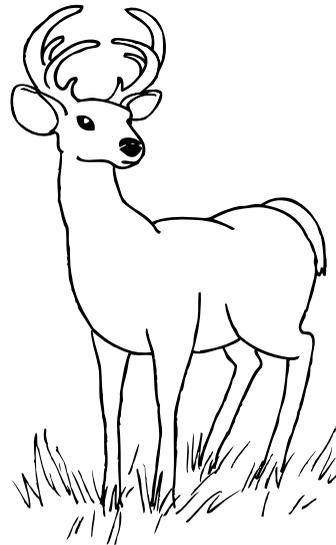
1. _____



2. _____



3. _____



4. _____

1. Meadowlark 2. Goldenrod 3. Honey bee 4. White-tailed deer

Compromise

Bills can be complicated, some totaling over 1,000 pages! A single bill can propose several ideas for changing law, and many senators may not agree with each of the proposed changes. Other senators may think they have a better way to accomplish the same goal. In order for a senator to be successful, he or she must be able to work well with the other 48 senators. This often requires the ability to compromise, or agree to some things you may dislike in order to get some things you really want.

Complete the exercise below to learn more about the value of compromise.

Exercise:

- 1) If your class were to share a pizza, what kind would you get? Write down your favorite pizza, including the toppings you prefer.
- 2) As a class, debate what type of pizza the class should select. Take individual turns to explain why your pizza proposal is best.
- 3) Vote on your pizza proposals. Take the three proposals with the most votes and allow students to debate which one of the three should be picked. Allow time for students to make compromises among themselves, then take a final vote.
- 4) Discuss as a class why compromise was difficult to achieve. What are the benefits of compromise?

Visiting the Capitol

One of the best ways to learn more about the Nebraska Legislature is to visit the Nebraska State Capitol Building in Lincoln. There are many things that you can do at the Capitol.

1) Take a Tour of the Capitol Building

To schedule a tour, call the State Capitol Tours Office at 402-471-0448 or visit the tour office, which is located near the north entrance on the second floor of the Capitol.

2) Watch Floor Debate

If the Legislature is in session, you can watch senators debate from a balcony in the Norris Chamber. For information regarding the schedule of the Legislature, visit NebraskaLegislature.gov.

3) Attend a Committee Hearing

During session, the Legislature holds numerous committee hearings that are open to the public. Check the public hearing schedule posted at NebraskaLegislature.gov.

4) Meet Your Senator

Many senators will gladly meet with students from their district. Be sure to contact your senator in advance of your visit. Contact information for each senator can be found at NebraskaLegislature.gov.

5) Visit the Observation Deck

The Observation Deck on the 14th floor level is open to visitors during public hours as weather permits.

6) See the Nebraska Hall of Fame

Bronze busts of the Nebraska Hall of Fame members are located on the second floor of the Capitol.

7) View Photos of State Senators

Photos of former and current legislators are displayed in the west hallway of the first floor.

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Clerk of the Legislature
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Lincoln, NE 68509
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NebraskaLegislature.gov